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ABSTRACT

The academic success of the speech communications internship experience depends on the coordinated effort of all three of the key players in the internship--the intern, the site supervisor and the academic coordinator/director. For this relationship to be most effective, for the development of open channels and shared expectations, the "we-they" dichotomy implied in "work world" vs. "academic world" must be eliminated. The site supervisor can assist in producing a quality learning experience by exploring and defining the role of the intern within the department and/or organization, developing a clear job description for the intern, providing an orientation program for the intern, and serving as a mentor for the intern. There is also a role for the academic coordinator. He or she can assist the site supervisor by defining learning goals and academic expectations and keeping open communication channels. The academic coordinator can support the supervisor's efforts to create an effective learning experience by assisting the supervisor in performing the functions of the mentoring role, encouraging the supervisor to join professional organizations designed to assist intern supervisors, and showing gratitude to the supervisor for his/her efforts in working with the intern. When both supervisor and coordinator realize that they share the roles of mentor, evaluator, learner and expert (among others), the dichotomy between the two worlds can begin to dissolve and the possibility of shared responsibility for learning increases. (TD)

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BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AGENCY SUPERVISOR: AN ACADEMIC INTERNSHIP COORDINATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

by

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INTRODUCTION

The academic success of the internship experience depends on the coordinated effort of all three of the key players in the internship--the intern, the site supervisor and the academic coordinator/director. It is an error in judgement to assume that the site supervisor plays a lessor role in the arena of academic learning because she or he is not affiliated with academia; at the same time, it is just as grave an error to assume that the site supervisor is capable and/or ready to assume full responsibility for the learning process. "Relationship" is a key word in the title of this paper, as it implies a shared responsibility; at the same time, "relationship building" from the communication perspective involves open channels of communication and efforts to share expectations. As with any relationship, the three-party relationship between intern, supervisor and academic coordinator sometimes "works", and sometimes does not "work." Frequently when it does not work, it is due to unclear expectations and underdeveloped or underutilized channels of communication.

For this relationship to be most effective, for the development of open channels and shared expectations, the "we-they" dichotomy implied in "work world" vs. "academic world" must be eliminated. Instrumental in eliminating this barrier is the realization of the number of roles which both the supervisor and coordinator share. When both supervisor

and coordinator realize that they share the roles of mentor, evaluator, learner and expert (among others), the dichotomy between the two worlds can begin to dissolve and the possibility of shared responsibility for learning increases.

With this basic philosophy in mind, two questions can lead the supervisor and coordinator in seeking strategies which will mutually support their roles in the intern's learning process. These two questions are: (1.) How can the site supervisor assist in producing a quality learning experience? (2.) How can the academic coordinator assist the site supervisor in these same efforts?

HOW CAN THE SITE SUPERVISOR ASSIST IN PRODUCING A QUALITY LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

Role of Intern in the Organization

One of the initial steps a supervisor can take in ensuring a quality learning experience is exploring and defining the role of intern within the department and/or organization. The supervisor must be aware of the intern as someone other than a volunteer or a regular employee, although the internship may have characteristics of both. The key difference is that the intern should be deliberate and self-conscious in the role of learner, and this role is a driving force in the experience. In addition, the intern has a more short-term perspective in the organization than a regular employee, and therefore should be able to accomplish

something valuable and tangible in the short time. The supervisor must also be aware of the intern as more than a go-fer, yet not a resident expert. The intern certainly will perform some mundane or routine tasks, but these should be secondary to the focus of the internship; the intern certainly brings special skills, knowledge and fresh insights, but should not be expected to fill a gap in an area where the staff lacks basic skills or knowledge. During this defining period, the supervisor is determining not only how the intern fits, but also the suitability of an intern, as well as the strategies for ensuring that the intern has a clearly defined position recognized by the organization as a whole.

Clear Job Description

In preparing for the intern, consideration should be given to how the intern can be used in the organization. Just as an employer would never expect to, nor would want to hire an employee without a job description, a supervisor should develop a job description for the intern. This job description should define responsibilities and duties of the intern, outline projects with goals realistic to the shortened time frame of the internship, identify specific skills necessary to performance of these duties. This will help to guide the intern and academic advisor in developing learning goals, and will serve all parties throughout the internship in assessing success of the intern. Thought

should be given to number of hours the intern will be expected to work, to whom the intern will directly report, how the intern will be compensated (monetary, mileage reimbursement, and/or other concrete benefits such as meals, discounts, attendance at conferences, etc...), and where the intern work station will be located. Certainly this job description can be dealt with flexibly during the experience if all parties determine that is appropriate, but a job description helps to give structure to the experience.

Orientation/Training

Too often the intern is brought into the organization without any program for orientation to the organization or the job. Not only does this lead to increased frustration for the intern (and often for the supervisor), but it often means a slow start for the intern who already has a limited number of days in the organization. The time and energy invested in initial orientation will be rewarded by increased enthusiasm and more directed performance on the part of the intern.

Role as Mentor

The internship supervisor should be aware of his or her role as a mentor to the intern. Once the supervisor begins to perceive self as a mentor, s/he is empowered in their relationship to the intern, as well as seeks to empower the

intern. Seeing self as mentor means defining the supervisory role beyond that of one who is responsible for seeing that the intern does his or her job; it means thinking of the supervisory role as one of a guide, advisor, coach, teacher and role model for the protege. The mentor provides a supportive relationship for the protege by taking interest in the personal and professional development of the protege.

Mentoring functions include:

-assessing self in terms of assumptions held about the intern which may be dysfunctional to the relationship (such as expecting intern to learn by observation without guidance; expecting intern to initiate and ask questions; expecting intern to take advantage of the organizational setting without assistance to do such);
-challenging self to be aware of, and to assist the intern in moving through the developmental stages of an internship (including orientation, disillusion, integration and termination);
-reminding self of the intern's learning objectives;
-guiding the intern yet providing freedom for development to independence;
-continually providing feedback to the intern, both positive and negative, which is descriptive and empowering to the intern (regularly scheduled weekly meetings assist this process);
-encouraging the intern to problem solve;
-helping the intern to focus and reflect on observations;
-challenging the intern to develop new areas of expertise, and new confidences;
-assisting the intern's acceptance in the organization (small gestures include blurbs in newsletters, picture on bulletin boards, identifying a specific work area for the intern, extending invitations to parties, etc..);
-opening areas of the organization to the intern through introductions, interviews, attendance at meetings, explanations about channels, politics, processes;
-introducing the intern to, and advising the intern about the profession or career;

-sharing personal experiences within the profession;
-promoting the intern within the organization and the profession (simple strategies include giving credit to intern in written form for work accomplished, taking intern to professional meetings, introducing intern into the professional network, providing letters of reference, etc...);
-consulting with the academic supervisor on any problems which can not be worked out with the intern directly.

Performing these and other mentoring functions requires minimal energy, yet will enrich the intern's learning experience and will provide a feeling of self fulfillment for the supervisor.

HOW CAN THE ACADEMIC COORDINATOR ASSIST THE SITE SUPERVISOR?

From the perspective that supervisor and coordinator share a number of roles, it would be inappropriate to discuss how the supervisor might help create a valuable learning experience without addressing the role the academic coordinator can play in assisting the supervisor in meeting those expectations. The following discussion offers insights into the academic coordinator's role with the supervisor. (Although not discussed here, it should be noted that the coordinator's interaction with the intern can also provide indirect assistance to the supervisor).

Defined Learning Goals and Academic Expectations

When the academic coordinator works with the intern to develop a written learning agreement, s/he is assisting the

supervisor in achieving those learning goals. In addition, when the learning agreement and/or other materials from the department outline responsibilities of all parties, and expectations of the three parties, then the supervisor is empowered to take on the mentoring role more effectively. The academic coordinator who communicates these expectations and goals to the supervisor is paving the way to a more cooperative relationship among all three parties.

Open Communication Channels

One of the challenges to the internship academic coordinator is to find the appropriate balance of availability to the site supervisor. It is important to give space to the supervisor to allow for the intern-supervisor relationship to develop as a natural work relationship; at the same time, the academic advisor who stays too removed from the supervisor cuts off an opportunity to assist the supervisor in the mentoring role.

The mid-term visit by the academic coordinator to the site seems to be an excellent strategy for demonstrating active interest, for assuring that communication channels are open, and for providing active support to the supervisor. Other initial contacts, such as an introductory letter and an initial phone call are gestures suggesting availability should need arise.

Support of Supervisor

The academic coordinator can provide direct support of the supervisor's efforts to create an effective learning experience. At the same time, it is important that the academic coordinator be aware of the parameters of his or her role with the supervisor. The coordinator is to make every effort to assure that the internship provides a quality learning experience. It is not the role of the coordinator to change the supervisor's management style, nor to influence the operations of the organization. It is important for the coordinator to be sensitive to the potential intimidation which the supervisor may experience when the coordinator comes on site or offers suggestions. This should not interfere with the coordinator performing these functions, but awareness can assist the coordinator in selecting the most effective strategies.

One way to provide support to the supervisor in his or her efforts to create an effective learning experience is to assist the supervisor in performing the functions of the mentoring role. Strategies include:

-guiding the feedback process by providing an outline of areas for evaluation, or by coaching the supervisor during interactions to talk descriptively about performance when comments are given evaluatively;
-providing information on phases which interns typically move through in the internship experience;
-suggesting strategies which the supervisor may elect to use in the internship;
-providing a manual outlining expectations, definitions, and tips for mentoring;

-developing a training program for internship supervisors which addresses the role of supervisor as mentor and evaluator (or other issues identified by the supervisors or coordinator).

Another approach to supporting the supervisor in meeting expectations is to encourage the supervisor to join professional organizations designed to assist intern supervisors, such as the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education, or state organizations designed for the same purpose. Sharing published materials or articles related to effective internship supervision can also be an effective strategy.

A third way to encourage the supervisor is to sincerely show gratitude to the supervisor for efforts in working with the intern. Supervisor's appreciate direct feedback concerning their work with the intern; they can profit from the perspective the coordinator brings from observing supervision of interns at different sites.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper has been to share one internship academic coordinator's perspective on ways the site supervisor could assist the internship to go beyond being a work experience to becoming a valuable learning experience. It was suggested that the "we-they" dichotomy implied in "work world" vs. "academic world" must be eliminated, and that instrumental in eliminating this barrier is the realization of the number of roles which both

the supervisor and coordinator share. When both supervisor and coordinator realize that they share the roles of mentor, evaluator, learner and expert (among others), the dichotomy between the two worlds can begin to dissolve and the possibility of shared responsibility for learning increases. With this perspective as a base, the role of the supervisor was explored. Issues addressed included the importance of a clear understanding of the role of the intern in the organization, a well-defined job description, an orientation/training program, and an understanding of the supervisor's role as a mentor. Also consistent with this perspective is the importance of addressing the role that the intern coordinator can play in assisting the supervisor in meeting these expectations. Issues addressed included providing clear learning goals and role expectations, open communication channels, and support strategies for the supervisor.

This paper only addresses one aspect of the dynamic relationship between supervisor, intern, and academic coordinator. There are a number of issues/perspectives not addressed and yet unexplored. The inter-relationship among these three persons is critical to the effective internship experience. These players form a system of interdependent parties which often goes unrealized and unappreciated even by the parties themselves. Much direction can still be provided to these key players to help ensure that the internship provides the rich learning experience that is possible.

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